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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000254

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: ABIA STATE GOVERNOR RACE HAS NATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

REF: 06 LAGOS 1396

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B and D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Poloff's visit to Abia State on March 29 showed a tight gubernatorial race. Obasanjo adversary Governor Orji Kalu steered the the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) nomination to his Chief of Staff Theodore Orji, but Orji faces a tough challenge from People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Onyema Ugochukwu. This is a battle of proxies. The real competition is between Kalu and the national PDP, personified by President Obasanjo. It is a contest to see whether the maverick Kalu, who broke away from the PDP, can hold Abia against a determined PDP. End summary.

PPA: We Have the Organization to Win

¶2. (C) On March 29, Poloff visited Umuahia, the capital of Abia State. Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) Administrative Secretary Richard Nwogbara boasted that the party continued to grow nationally. Governor Orji Kalu's presidential campaign was going well, as the Governor had shown strength in Abia, Lagos and Akwa Ibom. PPA's primary opposition in Abia was the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which had been bolstered by an influx of members from the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA).

¶3. (C) Eze Emeka Onuoha, Abia State PPA Chairman, painted a similar rosy story. PPA gubernatorial candidate Theodore Orji, former Chief of Staff to Kalu, has no electoral experience but managed Abia State with the Governor for seven years. In that time Kalu built roads, hospitals, and created scholarship programs, Onuoha claimed. In contrast, PDP candidate Onyema Ugochukwu, former Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Chairman, did nothing for Abia State, Onuoha remarked. Ugochukwu did not want to leave the lucrative NDDC but was pushed by the PDP to run for Abia Governor. Even now, Ugochukwu is not taking the campaign

seriously. In Onuoha's estimation, the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) candidate Ikechi Emenike is an underrated darkhorse.

¶14. (C) Onuoha told Poloff that Kalu moved the entire Abia PDP party structure to the PPA. The PPA will have its agents in all the polling booths, who will ensure the vote is counted accurately. All the PPA is asking is to allow the populace to determine the election, Onuoha said. If there is an attempt to manipulate the vote, the masses will rise in opposition, Onuoha predicted.

Kalu's Spotty Performance as Governor Hurts PPA

¶15. (C) While some Igbos see Kalu as their champion, others claim Kalu has done little to justify the presidency. Uche Nwosu, correspondent for the Daily Independent, had no encomiums for Governor Kalu or his party. Kalu, Nwosu observed, accomplished little for the state while pursuing his national ambitions.

¶16. (C) Upon Kalu's election people expected a lot, but for the most part Kalu has failed to deliver, Nwosu commented. The roads Kalu built have broken down, and while power shortages are commonplace Kalu did little to alleviate them. Kalu failed to establish basic land rules, and has accomplished no major projects, Nwosu remarked. Criticizing with faint praise, Nwosu said Kalu's greatest accomplishment was steering the local football club to victory in the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Cup. Nwosu added that Kalu's mother Eunice was the most powerful person in the State, affecting most decisions and controlling the awarding of contracts. As a result of this perceived lack of achievement, Kalu has seen his popularity fall precipitously.

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EFCC Goes After Kalu Through His Allies

¶17. (C) Kalu's feud with Obasanjo is well-known, Nwosu observed, and the Federal Government wanted to break Kalu. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) targeted the Governor's mother Eunice Kalu, who has supposedly fled to the Benin Republic. Kalu's candidate Orji also felt the scrutiny of the EFCC when he was arrested on charges that as Chief of Staff he transferred 2.8 billion naira (approximately \$21.9 million) in Local Government Council (LGC) funds to Kalu's private company Slok Airlines. LGC Chairmen said they were given 18-20 million but the account recorded 100 million naira, Nwosu said. Since his arrest, Orji has done little campaigning since. (Comment: LGC funds are notorious targets for graft. The EFCC is investigating charges of theft of LGC funds in Enugu by the Commissioner for Local Government. End comment)

APGA Weakening, ANPP Strengthening,
but PDP Favored to Win

¶18. (C) Nwosu gauged APGA gubernatorial candidate Uzodinma Okpara, son of the revered Igbo leader Michael Okpara, as having no chance of winning in Abia. The former state PDP Chairman, Okpara joined APGA in 2006. While Okpara can woo voters who remember his father, he has no money. Nwosu observed that before 2003, APGA was very strong, but the PDP Governors saw APGA as a threat to their hold on power and have done a great deal to enervate that party in the intervening years.

¶19. (C) Nwosu predicted Ugochukwu would win the Abia governorship, though he said ANPP candidate Emenike was

popular and had a chance to pull the upset. Ugochukwu had gained some trust with the voters, Nwosu said, but more importantly Abia voters wanted to vote for a candidate in tune with the national party. Although Ugochukwu did not steer projects to Abia as NDDC Chairman, he still accomplished more than the current NDDC chair. Given the stakes, Nwosu predicted the election would be rigged, and he thought there was the strong possibility of violence.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Abia State governor's race is worth watching, in order to follow the political career of the colorful and controversial Kalu. It is possibly the closest gubernatorial race in the Southeast, and is a test of Kalu's ability to remain a player in Southeast politics. The gubernatorial race could go to either the PDP or PPA, though the ANPP and APGA have a chance and will draw significant votes. Kalu's political power would be severely weakened if he loses Abia to the PDP. Voting irregularities and political violence will likely occur. The story will bore down to which party, PDP or PPA, had best been able to deploy their operations in order to influence the vote count after the ballots have been cast. End comment.

BROWNE